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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NAS Monthly Report April 2005: Aerial Eradication  
at Record Levels

REF: (A) Bogota 3914

1. (SBU) Summary: In April, the Colombian National Police (CNP) spray program eradicated 16,153 hectares of coca. The CNP destroyed 10 cocaine HCL labs and seized 10.5 metric tons of cocaine and coca base, and 94 kilos of heroin. U.S. and Plan Colombia assets assisted the police in heavy fighting against FARC forces in Toribio, Cauca Department.

#### Eradication and Interdiction

2. (SBU) Eradication: During the month of April, OV-10s operating from San Jose del Guaviare, and later Apiay, Meta Department, sprayed approximately 3,334 hectares; AT-802s operating from Tumaco, Narino Department, sprayed approximately 9,884 hectares of coca. T-65s operating from Neiva, Huila Department, and Mariquita, Tolima Department, sprayed 115 hectares of poppy and 2,935 hectares of coca. In total, CNP aircraft sprayed approximately 16,153 hectares of coca during the month of April. In 2005, the CNP eradication program has sprayed more than 74,361 hectares of coca and 936 hectares of poppy. This is well ahead of last year's record setting pace.

3. (SBU) Armed narco-terrorists fired on eradication and COLAR aircraft 13 times in April, striking the aircraft 26 times. The insurgents struck the fixed wing AT-802's one time, T-65's three times, and OV-10's five times. They also hit rotary wing Huey UH-1N aircraft twice, Plan Colombia Program UH-1N helicopters seven times, and the UH-1H-II and UH-60 helicopters four times each.

4. (SBU) During April, COLAR Plan Colombia helicopters continued to support CD Brigade troops and eradication operations in Laramdia, Caqueta Department, Tumaco, Narino Department, Apiay, Meta Department, and Neiva, Huila Department, as well as training operations in Tolemaida. Plan Colombia helicopters transported 2,589 passengers and 160,545 pounds of cargo during 1,880 flight hours. Twenty-six patients required 60 hours of flight time for medical evacuations.

5. (SBU) On April 15, the Colombian Army received two UH-60 and four UH-1H-II helicopters to protect the 174 kilometers of petroleum pipeline in Arauca Department under the Infrastructure Security Strategy Program. NAS recently completed a construction project in Saravena, Arauca Department, to support both aerial eradication operations and the Infrastructure Security Strategy Program. NAS is expecting delivery of four additional UH-1H-II helicopters in the near future.

6. (SBU) On April 29, Plan Colombia helicopters supported a joint Colombian Army/National Police medical evacuation 60 miles from Tumaco, Narino Department. After an attack by armed insurgents on a small National Police outpost in the area, five wounded police officers required evacuation. Unfortunately, a sixth police officer died prior to the evacuation.

7. (SBU) NAS Aviation Unit (NAU) began a 10-day maintenance stand-down during the last week of April to improve the availability of the OV-10 fleet. During this stand-down period, all personnel attended refresher safety classes and aircrews and search and rescue personnel received additional survival and evasion training.

8. (SBU) During April, the NAS Aviation Unit met with personnel from U.S. Southern Command to discuss deploying U.S. Air Force tactical weather sensors to forward operating locations. These sensors are expected to provide real-time weather reports to aircrews and improve SOUTHCOM's weather forecasting capabilities.

9. (SBU) Interdiction: In April, the CNP destroyed 10 cocaine HCL labs and seized almost 10.5 Metric Tons of cocaine HCL, coca base, and 94 kilos of heroin. In 2005, the CNP has seized more than 26 metric tons of Cocaine HCL and destroyed 63 Cocaine HCL laboratories.

110. (SBU) On April 1, the DIRAN Northern Zone Task Force assaulted an AUC camp near Aguachica, Cesar Department. DIRAN captured three armed AUC members, but the AUC leader reportedly hiding there escaped. DIRAN destroyed a cocaine HCL laboratory and equipment cache only a mile from this armed terrorist camp. The next day DIRAN discovered and destroyed another nearby AUC cocaine HCL lab and three precursor storage sites.

111. (SBU) On April 5, DIRAN conducted an air assault on another AUC camp, 30 miles west of Bogota. The DIRAN assault force captured 12 armed and uniformed AUC members and various automatic weapons. The next day DIRAN destroyed two more AUC cocaine HCL labs near Mariquita, Tolima Department.

112. (SBU) On April 14, the FARC attacked the 82-man Police Station in Toribio, Cauca Department, killing two policemen and wounding six others. (see reftel) Toribio is one of 158 municipalities supported by the "Police Reestablishment in Conflictive Zones" project in which the police are equipped with U.S. provided M16's, M60 Machine Guns, sandbags, radios, frequency scanners, and ammunition. The FARC killed one civilian, wounded 27 others, destroyed 18 houses, and partially damaged 120 more. The Colombian National Police, Air Force, and Army forces re-established control of the town in joint operations lasting several days. U.S.-trained and equipped units played a key role in the GOC reaction to armed assaults against civilians.

#### DIRAN Base Defense

113. (SBU) DIRAN base defense upgrades continued in Villagarzon and San Miguel, both in Putumayo Department, and Toribio, Cauca Department. The CNP school in Espinal trained 31 DIRAN policemen and presidential security personnel in a nine-week explosives disposal and implementation course. DIRAN HQ at El Dorado established a temporary night vision goggle (NVG) repair facility. This facility allows the CNP to conduct depot level repairs on NVGs. In addition, 48 CNP police officers departed for various training courses in the United States.

#### Law Enforcement

114. (SBU) The Carabinero squadrons (EMCAR) continue to provide security for the major lines of transportation and communication across areas of conflict throughout Colombia. The Cauca squadron was one of the first units to react, along with DIRAN Junglas, to the attack on Toribio, and played a significant role in clearing the FARC from inside the town. The Narino Squadron had one police officer killed in action and five others wounded in fighting at El Palmar, Narino Department. Helicopters from a joint eradication and COLAR operation evacuated the casualties and provided gunship support to the carabinero unit.

115. (SBU) In the first quarter of CY05 EMCAR squadrons captured 1,551 people: 92 narco-traffickers, 181 FARC/ELN, 98 AUC, and 1,180 common criminals, plus 718 weapons, 13,052 gallons of liquid cocaine chemical precursors, 16,596 kilograms of solid precursors, and 691 kilograms cocaine base. The squadrons had 5 police officers killed in action and 32 wounded during the first quarter and killed 8 terrorists (1 ELN, 3 FARC and 4 AUC). Additionally, the EMCAR manually eradicated 57 hectares of poppy and 879 hectares of coca plants.

#### Joint Exercises

116. (SBU) U.S. organizations supported the joint Firewall Exercise II in Santa Marta. Colombian participants included personnel and equipment from the Colombian Navy, Coast Guard, DIRAN, and Colombian Air Force. All exercises focused on the disruption of cocaine fast boat shipments and testing USG provided communications systems.

#### CNP Aviation (ARAVI)

117. (SBU) In April, the three largest components of ARAVI's fleet clocked 1,364 mission hours: The UH-1H helicopters flew 702 mission hours with an operational readiness (O.R.) rate of 48 percent. Twenty eight percent of the helicopters required depot level major structural repairs. Bell 212 helicopters flew 341 mission hours with an operational readiness rate of 71 percent, and UH-60 helicopters flew 321 mission hours with an operational readiness rate of 59 percent. A combination of fuel leaks and battle damage contributed to this unusually low O.R. rate. ARAVI aircraft also provided gun-ship and intelligence support for attacks on cocaine-processing labs and the joint reaction to the

armed terrorist attacks on the village of Toribio, Cauca Department.

#### Public Security

18. (SBU) The GOC is planning 11 new medium and maximum-security prisons. The prison design group traveled to the U.S. to speak with U.S. BOP design experts and looked at a variety of different designs of US prisons that could be suitable for Colombia. The Bureau of Prisons representative attended meetings with senior Ministry of Justice officials to discuss design and management changes in the Colombian prison system that may be necessary when using modern prison facilities.

#### Air Bridge Denial

19. (SBU) No Air Bridge Denial events occurred during April. CNP followed 4003 aircraft tracks over Colombia; 32 were declared Unidentified, Assumed Suspect (UAS). The GOC reacted to 15 UAS contacts. One was subsequently identified as friendly, another reached international waters before phase I could be started, and the other 13 could not be intercepted. The GOC did not react to 17 UAS: Due to bad weather, the suspect reached international borders, old information, the contact was later identified as friendly, or the contact was out of range.

#### Environment

20. (SBU) In April the spray complaints group received 44 new complaints, completed 30 complaint investigations, and paid no complaints. The GOC reached an accord with indigenous tribal leaders and gained permission to conduct eradication on indigenous reservations in the southern department of Guaviare and in the northern part of Colombia, though no operations are currently planned. The GOC needs more consultations between tribal leaders and the GOC to gain nationwide access to coca fields currently in protected reservations. The Colombian Congress is conducting debates on aerial eradication in the national parks.

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